the future Afghanistan.

- The training must be on a technological level that is appropriate to and in accordance with the needs, resources and culture of Afghanistan.
- The training and education programmes should emphasize the participation of women and girls as widely as possible. The women and girls have carried their heavy share of the burden of war and exile, and they are half of the resources of the young Afghan generation.

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TEN YEARS OF WAR AND CIVIL WAR IN AFGHANISTAN - AN EDUCATIONAL CATASTROPHY FOR AN ENTIRE GENERATION

by

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Education is a central issue to the future of an independent and democratic Afghanistan. Speaking of education, I am not only referring to theoretical and academic education - "learning from books" - but also to that training in practical skills which took place informally in the context of the village and bazaar, the "learning by doing". Both are equally important for the reconstruction and development of the Afghanistan that has been devastated by lo years of war and civil war, resulting in a wide-scale destruction of its economy, the agriculture, as well as of its intellectual resources.

Formal education has an old history in Afghanistan, having been closely connected to the Islamic religious tradition. This education was essentially religious on various levels, from local village schools where mullahs (village priests) taught the young children reading of the Koran and the observing of ceremonies and rituals, to sophisticated centres of learning, madrasas, where Islamic scholars and holy men (maulvis, qadis, and pirs) taught religion, doctrines and disputes, as well as Koranic law.

Secular, Western-oriented, so-called "modern" education has developed more recently, beginning with the foundation of the Habibia lycée in Kabul by king Habibullah in the beginning of this century, and was only in the process of being established on a country-wide scale by the government in the 5o-es, 6o-es and 7o-es. The government educational system was a comprehensive system of schools on different levels, from primary through secondary up to University level (Kabul University). Elementary schools, primary as well as secondary, were found in every provincial town, and

and primary schools in many villages. In 1977, 1o,ooo students were enrolled at Kabul University and 8oo ooo pupils in 4,ooo elementary schools (Safi, 1988).

The educational system was mainly developed with the help of foreign aid from several countries cooperating with the Afghan government, the most important being West Germany, France, USA, and later USSR. Thus, up to 1978, the modern Afghan educational system was exceptionally cosmopolitan, a fact which reflected the Afghan development policy of seeking partners of cooperation from different countries and political blocs, balancing each country's influence out, in order to remain neutral and non-aligned.

At high-school level, although the curriculae were predominantly Western and secular, but yet comprising Persian and Pashto language and literature, <u>religion</u> was still compulsory, but taught by government teachers and not by <u>mullahs</u> and <u>maulvis</u>. At university level, the teaching was entirely modern, and closely modelled after Western subjects and faculties.

The <u>attitudes</u> towards modern education were increasingly positive, not only the capital and provincial towns, but also in the provinces. Already in the 196o-es, most students at Kabul University had a rural background (Roy, 1988). Education was increasingly recognized as an alternative to traditional careers such as farming, especially in areas where the viability of individual farming units were threatened by increasing fragmentation of land through inheritance. In many landowning families, sons - as well as a growing number of daughters - found alternative ways of living in e.g. government administration, the army, teaching, or in clerical and nursing jobs. People in the villages were eagerly building schools, even for girls, as e.g. in the village in Kunar in Eastern Afghanistan, where I and my family stayed from 1977 to 1978.

<u>Practical training</u> in crafts and skills traditionally took place in the family or, in the bazaars and towns, through an apprenticeship system.

In the family, the children learnt the tasks assigned to each sex through their general socialization, from the examples of their parent, along with learning the values and rules of behaviour of Afghan culture. Girls began to learn the tasks of women from early age, first by imitation, later by helping in the household

with different chores, cooking, fetching water, tending their younger sisters and brothers, etc. The boys grew up learning the skills of their fathers, agriculture, animal husbandry, or perhaps a craft, if the family bolonged to a specialized group of artisans such as carpenters, potters, gold-smiths etc.

War and the Crisis of Education

After the coup in 1978 (the "Saur" revolution) and the Soviet invasion in 1979, the development of the educational situation in Afghanistan has been disastrous in several respects.

Losing its former broad and pluralistic character, the educational system became almost uniquely dependent on Soviet educational aid and teachers from the USSR and East Germany. Russian curriculae, textbooks, and teaching material were soon introduced. Gradually the educational policy assumed the character of "ideological warfare", as what has been termed the attempts of sovietization of Afghan education and culture, by Afghan educationalists.

Already during the summer of '78, the atmosphere at Kabul University became perceptibly strained and poisoned by fear and suspicion. Old friends of my husband and myself no longer dared keep in touch with us for fear of their students informing on them and reprisals from the government. There was a growing pressure on the intellectuals in such fields as administration and education to conform to the party ideology of the Kabul government, with heavy repression of the non-conformists in the form of massive jailings and executions of intellectuals.

This has resulted in a large-scale exodus into exile by Afghan intellectuals, the dimensions of which, together with the executions, can be characterized as a veritable brain drain[1].

The majority of the Afghan intellectuals have resettled in the West, except for a few who have chosen to remain in Pakistan in order to continue research and documentation from there, as part of the resistance effort.

Obviously, this ongoing brain-drain process, which amounted to the total of 90% being either killed or exiled by 1987[2], is going to create an extremely serious vacuum in the reconstruction of the teaching and administration of a free Afghanistan.

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1) as e.g. by Mr. Rasul Amin, former lecturer at Kabul University in his article "Brain Drain Problem", journal of WUFA, 1986)

2) Prof. S.B. Majrooh and Prof. S.M.Y.Elmi: The Sovietization of

Over the years of war and Soviet invasion, the attempts of sovietization of Afghans have been increasingly concentrated on children between the age of 6 and 12 - the Russians apparently having given up hope of an ideological "reeducation" of the adult Afghans. Thus, the battle for Afghanistan has also come to be a "battle for the children's minds".

The main aspects of these efforts inside Afghanistan have been extensive teaching of Russian language and culture, including media such as films and TV. In addition, over lo,ooo students between 12 and 2o have allegedly been sent to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe for training and education, plus large but unknown numbers of boys between 6 and 12, who have been sent to USSR for schooling, many against their own will or their parents' knowledge and permission.

Despite these efforts towards indoctrination and sovietization, the effects of this policy are up till now still doubtful.

According to a report on Afghan education published in Pakistan 1987[1], one particular group within Afghan society is especially susceptible to Marxist ideological influence, namely the urban youth, educated at the modern schools and colleges, in particular the Kabul Polytechnic. The "ideological warfare" seems to have had little effect either on the village people in the provinces, who are deeply rooted in their popular and religious traditions, or on the highly educated intellectuals, who have a good knowledge of Western culture coupled with awareness of their cultural and spiritual roots in Afghanistan. - Of these groups, as we have seen, those surviving of the latter have largely left Afgnaistan or been forced to leave.

Even among the urban youth, the success of the sovietization campaign so far seems to be doubtful, despite the optimistic statistics of education of the DRA. There have been numerous protest strikes and demonstrations among the school pupils and students in the cities, including girls and young women, resulting in jailings and killings of the demonstrators. Many students have left Afghanistan and are leaving every year without completing their studies, som in order to avoid forced conscription to the army or being sent to the Soviet Union.

However, in a longer perspective, the sovietization strategy could no doubt constitute a serious threat to Afghan

1) Majrooh and Elmy, ibid.

identity and culture, leading a long way towards creating and consolidating an ideological support of Soviet influence in Afghanistan.

The other main aspect of the disastrous effects of war and civil war to education in Afghanistan has been the virtual destruction of educational facilities in the villages, as well as of the people's goodwill towards secular, modern education, also when non-Marxist.

Very soon after the coup in 1978, large sections of the rural population began to turn against the government's reform programmes, including educational reforms. One important reason was that many teachers in the government schools in the villages belonged to the Communist party, Khalk - in fact in many rural areas schoolteachers were the only supporters of the party. The Kabul government's clumsy and ill-timed attempts at literacy campaigns in the villages, especially those aimed towards women, carried more wood to the fire of popular resentment and growing resistance, already aroused by other causes for conflict, which in many areas, e.g. Kunar and Hazarajat (Central Afghanistan) soon led to open clashes and repression from the government army in the form of bombardments and massacres.

During the escalation of the civil war between 1979 and 1981, most school buildings were either destroyed or transformed into propaganda or administration centres for the Kabul government. According to the report on Afghan education by Profs Majrooh and Elmy previously referred to, approx. 78% of the educational institutions on all levels have been destroyed.

Faced with the serious crisis of education in Afghanistan, and the danger of an entire generation growing up either indoctrinated by the Kabul government or as complete illiterates, the resistance gradually attempted to reestablish village schools, mostly in mosques or traditional madrasas. But lack of money for teaching materials and salaries for teachers has been an effective barrier. Since 1983, the efforts to reconstruct schools in Afghanistan have been supported by international funds, primarily through the Afghan Education Committee which cooperates directly with the local commanders of the resistance and is backed by the Peshawar-based Swedish Committee for Afghanistan. According to the 1987 Annual

Report of the AEC, the committee supported 50 primary school projects in Afghanistan at the end of 1987: 258 schools, 37,880 pupils and 1124 teachers. In addition, teaching material up to Grade 6 has been developed by Afghan educationalists associated with the committee.

Education in Exile

For the generation of Afghans growing up outside Afghanistan, as refugees in Iran or Pakistan, conditions of education are not much better than inside Afghanistan.

In Iran (approx. 2.2. mill. Afghan refugees), school facilities for the Afghan children are almost non-existent. Some schools with mullah teachers have been established, but many Afghan children do not attend school at all. For the Afghans who live scattered in the cities of Iran, the possibility certainly exists of sending their children to local schools, but for different reasons, one of the most important being the differences in religious outlooks between the prdominantly Sunni Afghans and the Shi'ite Iranians, the refugees are reluctant to do so.

In Pakistan, on the other hand (with an estimated number of 2,874.000 rural Afghan refugees), international voluntary relief organizations and UNCHR in co-operation with the Government of Pakistan have established a comparatively exstensive network of schools for the Afghan children in the refugee camps. But this is still far from sufficient to cover the need. The Afghan exile parties also run schools in the camps and in the cities and villages, where the refugees live. In addition, the Afghan families who can afford the fees can send their children to Pakistani schools, where the teahing language is urdu.

The education programme has mainly been concentrated on covering the needs of elementary education. Above the primary level, the opportunities for further education, in secondary and middle schools as well as universities, are completely insufficient - despite the presence in Pakistan of many qualified Afghan teachers, who however are not provided with encouragement or funds to undertake the important task of educating the growing generation.

Number of schools for Afghan refugees supported by UNHCR in Pakistan in July 1987 1)

Primary schools	
Boys	486
Girls	76
Middle schools	
Boys	161
Girls	2
Secondary schools	
Boys	4
Girls	0

It is worth noting that the number of girls enrolled in the refugee schools constitute only about 6%, and that the ratio is drastically declining at higher educational levels.

The opportunities of vocational and skill training are also lamentably insufficient. There exists a limited number of training programmes and vocational training schools for Afghan refugees. In 1987, the total number of young Afghans (between lo and 2o years of age) enrolled in UNHCR-sponsored vocational schools was 2285 2). (It has not been possible to obtain a breakdown of the figure in boys/girls).

Different voluntary agencies have been particularly active in the field of skill-training and income-generating programmes, with the purpose of increasing the possibilities of the refugees of self-sufficiency - to help the refugees to help themselves. Among those, the then small Austrian Relief Committee were been pioneers in an early phase.

The refugees experience a strong need for training. According to a survey carried out by UNRISD (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development) and supported by UNHCR and the Government of Pakistan, covering all areas where Afghan refugees are settled, almost 9o% of both men and women desire some kind of vocational training.

1) UNHCR, Pakistan Desk, Geneva. June 1988.

2) Ibid.

The highest priorities of the <u>male</u> refugees were given to skills such as tailoring, driving, carpentry, mechanics, and masonry.

The <u>women</u> wanted training in tailoring, embroidery, carpet weaving, beadwork, and domestic tasks.

For the <u>sons</u>, the parents desired "educated" jobs and professions such as teachers or doctors. According to the report, these high ambitions do not only reflect unrealistic expectations on part of the refugees, but also the positive fact that they have not given up hope, and that they can allow themselves to "have ambitions as much as anybody else."[1]

The negative conclusion of this picture is the almost total absence of motivation for learning skills related to farming. Of course, this must be seen in the context of refugee conditions in Pakistan, in which opportunities for farming are extremely limited, and agriculture consequently is no profitable "career" for an Afghan boy, thus offering no motivation nor opportunities of learning the farming skills from the father.

No doubt this tendency will have serious consequences to the capabilities of the young generation to participate in the reconstruction of the agricultural economy of Afghanistan.

<u>Education and the Future of Afghanistan</u>

The negative consequences of the lacking opportunities of education and training for the Afghan youth are many:

For the <u>refugees</u>, including those exiled in the West, the danger exists of cultural alienation and loss of identity, together with lacking capability and motivation of self-reliance, the core of traditional Afghan cultural values.

In Afghanistan there is the danger of an entire generation growing up as illiterates, a gun in hand from childhood. I wish to point out three important aspects of this cultural crisis:

- the lack of skills and motivation for learning farming and other practical skills that are vitally necessary to the reconstruction of Afghanistan;
- the crisis and setback of secular, Wester-oriented

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1) "Survey of the Social and Economic Conditions of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan", by Hanne Christensten and Wolf Scott, Geneva, April 1988. P. 65.

"modern" education including the liberal attitudes towards the education of girls. The widespread pre-war enthusiasm has now been replaced by reluctance or opposition - wrongly identifying "modern" education and education of girls with the image of the Kabul government and all that it stands for;

- the potential alienation and conflicts between the different groups of young Afghans: on the one hand those with a professional or technical education or training and who are stigmatized by having received their education under the Kabul government, and on the other, the young Afghans who have grown up either in Afghanistan or as refugees outside Afghanstan, with little or no education.

To these two groups come the educated Afghans who have emigrated to the Western world, and their children. How many will return, and how will their children be able to find their roots in Afghanistan?

* * * * *

Afghanistan desperately needs a young generation, educated and trained, in order to reconstruct the ruined economy, and to fill the gap of the brain-drain.

- Education and vocational training should be given a very high priority in the assistance programmes of international organizations already in the present phase, before the actual repatriation begins. Existing training programmes for refugees in Pakistan and Iran should be upgraded, and new started, in order to concentrate the efforts towards creating the skills necessary for the tasks of reconstruction.
- Training of skills related to agriculture should be given a priority, such as farming, animal husbandry, the construction and maintenance of wells and irrigation systems, the construction of houses and infrastructure, etc., as well as child-care, nutrition, hygiene and related topics, to improve life-quality in